



## MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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### MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: November 2, 2005

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VI(a): Consideration of resolution authorizing acceptance of an approximately three-acre conservation easement or fee simple dedication and trail easements from Tract No. 61887 in Shadow Hills, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing acceptance of an approximately three-acre conservation easement or fee simple dedication and trail easements from Tract No. 61887 in Shadow Hills.

Background: Collectively the habitat areas of Shadow Hills form one of two remaining habitat linkages between the Big Tujunga Wash (San Gabriel Mountains) and the Verdugo Mountains. Tract No. 61877 is located within the primary habitat area of Shadow Hills between Hansen Dam and Wheatland Avenue. Staff has secured a poor quality, east-west oriented conservation easement on a 68-acre property to the north. A few medium-sized ownerships exist between this 68-acre parcel and the subject 10-acre tract. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy commented on the project in December 2004 and requested a conservation easement over 2.4 acres at the eastern end of the property. At a hearing before the City of Los Angeles Deputy Advisory Agency in October 2005, a tract map for nine homes and an approximately 2.8-acre open space lot was approved. However, the approval may be appealed by residents. Staff will seek further clarification before the Governing Board meeting.

Staff made a commitment to the applicant to bring the subject action before the Governing Board at this juncture. The applicant wants to provide a fee simple dedication with related trail easements dedicated to either the City Department of Recreation and Parks or to the MRCA. However, the Department of Public Works is adamant about not allowing a fee simple open space lot unless it has a minimum 20-foot-wide connection to a public street. In the proposed case, an eight-foot-wide access/equestrian trail easement would connect the approximately three acres to a paved public street. It is an important juncture to make the case to the City that in many cases—such as the subject—that it is in the public interest to allow a variance to this 20-foot rule. The fallback position is to receive a conservation easement with numerous allowances and restrictions.

The subject 2.8 acres contains high quality coastal sage scrub habitat that provides both a contribution to the largest habitat block in Shadow Hills and a wildlife corridor to small patches of open space to the south. The lot would not require any fuel modification. It also provides for both an east-west and north-south equestrian trail. The acceptance of portions of these proposed trails that would fall within public street right-of-ways (that will be dedicated to the City) are not part of this proposed action. Likewise any section of trail that is proposed outside of City right-of-way is part of the proposed action to ensure there is an agency willing to accept trail easements. The open space lot (conservation easement boundary would be the same) and proposed trail easement sections are shown on the attached figure. The MRCA currently owns one 11-acre lot in the northwestern corner of Shadow Hills and is required by City conditions of approval to receive two additional conservation easements from Tract No. 53884 and Parcel Map 013044.